

Trapped... With No Way Out!

Last November, an 11-year-old girl died in a fire in her Baltimore, Md., home when flames trapped her on the second floor.

According to the investigators, her mother had cooked food in a microwave oven. When she removed the container, it was so hot that it burned the mother's hands, and she threw it in a trash can. The contents of the can ignited. The fire blocked their way to the kitchen sink, so the mother and daughter ran upstairs to get water to douse the flames.

While the girl was upstairs, the fire grew, and the child couldn't get back downstairs. Finally, the mother ran from the house, crying for help.

Neighbors called 911, then tried to rescue the child but couldn't get to her. They could see her at her bedroom window, but the window had security bars on it. The neighbors couldn't get in. When firefighters arrived and found the girl, she was dead from inhaling smoke and toxic gases.



Photo Composite by Evelyn Odango

Security bars may keep unwanted people out; but unfortunately, they can keep people in and prevent their being rescued in case of a fire.

From this tragedy, you can learn several lessons so a similar occurrence doesn't take place in your home.



When heating something in a microwave oven, make sure the container is OK to use in that kind of oven. Certain pottery or ceramic dishes have a high mineral content that makes them get extremely hot. Also, metal decorations on dishes will become hot enough to burn. When using paper takeout containers or baskets, check for metal fasteners. Either remove them or transfer the food to a container that is marked for use in microwave ovens.



If something overheats or catches fire in an oven—either conventional or microwave—keep the door closed, and turn off the oven. This will prevent a fire from spreading. Many times, the fire will go out when it uses up all the oxygen in the oven.



When cooking atop a stove, always have a lid handy that is large enough to cover the pot or pan should it ignite. Turn off the stove and cover the pot or pan. In all cases, evacuate the house immediately—even if you think the fire is out. Have a neighbor call the fire department.



Have a fire-escape plan, including two ways out from every area of the house, and make sure those escape routes are easy to use. Make sure door locks and window bars can be opened easily by everyone in your family from inside the house without any special key, tool or knowledge.



Have a meeting place designated outside the house and never re-enter a burning building.

If the family in Baltimore had followed these simple guidelines, they and their community would not be mourning the loss of a child. ❏

This information was sent to us by the Code Enforcement and Public Education Office of the Fort Meade Department of Fire and Emergency Services at Fort Meade, Md.